بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

*(In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful)*

# RE-INCARNATION OF SOULS

BY

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## RE-INCARNATION OF SOULS.

This theory which plays a great part in Hindu philosophy has also been accepted in Theosophy as one of its verities. We may not accept it, but we cannot cavil at the logic of it; more especially as it has received its genesis from the same causes which, in Muslim theology, brought Hell into existence. If life on earth is a life of preparation in which we have to attain certain qualifications essential for our entry into regions Divine—"Brahma loka" in the words of Krishna; if certain conditions, exclusively belonging to the earth, are necessary for such preparation, will it not be necessary, so would argue a Hindu divine, for us to return to earthly life again, if we have left it without acquiring the necessary perfection? We had to attain certain experiences not available in the next world; we left this world without doing so, and consequently we do need to come back to it again. The logic is not bad and the reasoning is quite plausible; but they do not coincide with what I find in the course

of evolution observable in the universe.

From ethereal specks and electronic collocations up to the human form, all manifestations and specializations of nature are constantly on the move to progress. They do not retrogress, nor do they retrace a single step that has once been taken on the path of progress. Things pass from region to region, and are translated from one state of being to another—sometimes perfect in condition, sometimes imperfect—in the course of progress ; but they are never permitted to return to the state of being they have left, to make up a deficiency.

If a thing has passed a stage of growth (or state of being) before it has been able to reach that perfection which it ought to have attained while in that stage of growth (or state of being), then new means, such as may be necessary for the rectification of the defect, are straightway forthcoming in the new region (stage of growth or state of being) to which it has been translated. For example :—a seed may leave a tree in defective condition. It need not go back into the trunk of the tree it came from, to make up

its deficiencies; you have only to plant it in a land with better climate, and to manure it properly, and this same, defective seed will sprout into a healthy tree, far more fruitful perhaps than the mother tree; and what is true in the vegetable kingdom is true also in other kingdoms. A child before its birth has to receive a certain amount of growth in the embryonic state, but if he is born with some physical defects he need not, and does not, go back into the mother's womb for the fault to be remedied. Surgical aid provides the cure—and though such methods of rectification are, without doubt, ultranatural and involve pain, yet they are the only means for amendment. And if a child, born with some physical infirmity, has never been permitted to retrace his footsteps to the womb for the purpose of having that infirmity removed, why should a person who has finished his course of earthly life—whatever the condition in which he passed from it may have been—ever come to this place again?

If therefore, this rule be universal in Nature, that that which has failed to attain to the requisite standard of perfection in one state

of being is passed into the state of being next highest, there to have its deficiencies supplied and its deformities corrected ; and if such system be the more expedient and the more conducive to rapidity of real progress then I fail to find any reason, cogent or otherwise, for subscribing to the theory of the transmigration of the soul.

Moreover, this same phenomenon that I have described, is observable in every stage through which matter has to pass before assuming human shape. The food we assimilate every day will eventually take the form of genital sperma, which will presently convert itself into the human shape of a child. The food has to pass through many stages before it reaches that stage. Things not properly cooked are sometimes taken in ; they cause pains in the stomach, but the trouble is removed by treatment. The food is not sent back from the stomach to the kitchen to be cooked again.

We take medicine to help the digestion, and enable the food to pass through the regions of the blood. Sometimes when, whether from some defect of the stomach or through the

function of a diseased liver, we produce poor blood, we seek a remedy in medicine, but no drop of that poor blood is allowed to return to the liver or stomach for the purpose of rectification; and the reason is simply this—that the means and circumstances necessary for blood formation exist in the stomach and liver only—not in the heart and the arteries of the blood. Though poor blood may germinate unhealthy seed, yet new means are ever at hand by which it may be restored to its proper conditions. The sperma never returns, never transmigrates, to the blood-regions, to make good defects in its growth.

If, therefore, what we have thus observed in the invariable processes of Nature can be considered to give us a reasonable basis for our belief in the matters of which I have been speaking, I am constrained to reject the theory of the transmigration of the soul, and accept the theory of Hell as propounded in the Qur-án.

## THEORY OF KARMA.

Closely allied to the "Transmigration of

the Soul" is the doctrine of Karma (actions). The two are one and the same theory, representing different aspects of the same doctrine; the one is substantive, the other adjective. The doctrine of Karma takes for its genesis the diversity of circumstances in which people find themselves at their birth, from causes beyond their control.

If some are born in affluence, poverty and indigence attend the birth of others; some are born into the world with bodily defects, while others are blessed with every bodily perfection; and this disparity, producing arbitrarily, as it does, comfort and discomfort, happiness and misery, does seem, if we are not at all to be held responsible for it, a strange blot on the impartiality of Divine Providence.

The theory of Karma, in Hindu theology however, thus explains this seeming incongruity in the Divine dispensation. All that we receive at our birth in the form of happiness or misery, and all the differences in social status that come into our being at birth, are, the Karmaist says, the outcome of our deeds in the life before the

present. We take birth after birth to complete our course on this earth, and what we sow in the one, we must reap in the next.

No one would question the logic of the view that human society works on the Law of Actions. That actions must bear their fruit is the basic principle of every other religion, except Paulinism. Differences in social position, in many cases, undoubtedly arise from our own actions. We are the creators of our own comfort and misery. But inferiority in the social scale in which every person finds himself at his birth in relation to another, must be ascribed to something wrong in one's bygone life, evil must needs, according to this doctrine, become essential for the very working of human society. Difference of occupation and variety of employment are the motive power of the social machinery. We must serve each other in a wide variety of differing capacities, if adequate contribution is to be made to the common comfort; for differentiation means progress, and progress is born of diversity. If, however, difference of this kind is to be attributed to some past wrong, then comfort and progress

must demand the existence of evil; men of one generation must commit sin so that, in the next, they may be reborn in the lower for the purpose of contributing to the happiness of the upper social stratum.

Superiority in A means inferiority in B, and the happiness of one person demands sacrifice from the other. And if sacrifice is essential for the proper working of society, evil and wrong which are supposed to be the cause of it under the aforesaid theory, become also essential for human progress. But a doctrine which makes evil a necessary item in the Divine Providence, is a gross insult to a Muslim's conception of God; and if, in this life, difference between man and man does in fact arise from past acts, how are we to explain that fundamental difference which must have existed at the very inception of our species? The process of procreation demands difference of sex. You may ascribe your present difference from another man to some cause in your previous life, but where were the actions which caused difference of sex in the first pair, whence our

species had its being? Difference in sonship and fatherhood is another difference which must exist even at the beginning of life. How are we to explain these differences when there was no previous life and consequently no previous action?

## HAPPINESS A BENEFICENCE AND NOT A FRUIT OF ACTION.

If all our present means of happiness are given to us as a reward for past actions, how are we to explain the happiness which comes to us providentially? Much of our happiness is derived from the varied manifestations of Nature—the sun, the moon, the earth and all that it provides; and the proportion of happiness that we acquire through our actions depends too, upon the working out, by us, of sources of Nature which were in existence long before man came on the earth. How can all this be the reward of our past actions? We cannot live without the pre-existence of millions of things in the universe; they all add to our happiness; and they all come as a beneficence of God, and not in reward of actions. Divine Providence,

as exhibited in Nature, makes Divine Blessing, which is the main store of our happi ness, a pre-existing thing; while the theory of Karma makes our actions to pre-exist the Divine Blessing, which is absurd on the face of it. If all our happiness has to arise from our actions, our happiness would be next to nothing. What comes out of our actions in the shape of happiness sinks into insignificance when compared with what we get as Divine Blessings. The Qur-án lays special stress on this point, as well as on the difference of sex, which, it says, is to be found in everything coming out of the earth, when dealing with the theory of the transmigration of the soul, in the following words :—

"And a sign to them is the dead earth: We give life to it and bring forth from it grain, so they eat of it. And We make therein gardens of palms and grape-vines, and We make springs to flow forth in it, that they may eat of the fruit thereof, *and their hands did not make it*; will they not be grateful? Glory be to Him Who created pairs of all things, of what the earth grows, and of their kind and of what they do not know."

## THE THEORY WEAKENS SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY.

If our actions receive their birth and mould from our beliefs, we should not entertain any tenet or doctrine which tends to ruin our sense of responsibiliy, and to create in us moral or mental imbecility.

Fatalism, in the received sense of the word, was condemned by Islam for this very reason. Atonement is another condemnable belief. If another has to bear a burden, incentive for action, on my part, is lost. Similarly, we strive our hardest to alleviate our misery, because we believe that it is possible to alleviate it; but when we find that our trouble is absolutely without remedy, our zeal is gone, for what, in such a case, is the use of trying? Our misery, under the theory of Karma, has come to us as the fruit of some past actions. It cannot be undone, and all our efforts to undo it will be in vain. I committed some wrong in a previous life, I must suffer for its consequences in the present life, and all my efforts to be free from it are simply to give the lie to that theory.

If A is down with cholera which he has got on account of some past wrong, it hardly befits him to seek medical relief if he subscribes to the principle of Karma. The theory thus makes man a fatalist, and thereby impedes human progress.

Pain in this life, they say, is the penalty of past actions. If persecution and want of comfort may come within the category of pain, no progress in human society has, till now, been achieved without them. The world has seen its best benefactors in the persons of prophets, reformers and philosophers, but, unfortunately, they are the persons who have always been subjected to every kind of persecution. Similarly all scientific discoveries, to which we owe so much of our comfort and happiness, are the fruits of pain and hardship. Should we believe that all these great teachers and inventors were wicked men and sinners of the first water in the past life, because they have been for the most part persecuted people and leading the most painful lives?

No one gets happiness without some pain

and pain is the penalty of sin. Evil, therefore, becomes essential for enjoying happiness in the life to come. Such a theory can have but few opportunities of giving birth to high character. If A receives some injury from B, it is, as a Hindu would say, to make up for some injury received by B from A in his previous existence. Thus, offence becomes a justification in the eye of a culprit, if he believes in Karma. I need not be thankful to my benefactors, because I receive from them only what I gave to them in charity in the life past. The more I think upon the subject, keeping in view all the consequences to which such beliefs must logically lead, the more I am strengthened in my conviction that the theory in dispute is a belief most unfavourable to our moral growth.

The explanation given by our Holy Qur-án of the misery around us, and of the social differences which we have been discussing, appeals to me more, as it strengthens my sense of responsibility.

I am told in the Qur-án that I am not only the engineer of my own life, but that I am also

responsible for the happiness and misery of my own descendants. Our interest in our children is, in most cases, stronger than our interest in our own selves. The welfare of the family often keeps its members away from such misdeeds as are sometimes unscrupulously committed by those who lead single lives.

If the consequences of every action I do be shared by my own children, I shall make my actions more steady and righteous. But if I alone have to reap what I sow, despair or temptation may, sometimes, lead me to extremes. Belief, therefore, that children born with bodily defects, owe their misfortune to paternity, which sometimes may come to them from three or four generations back, will generally prove a more efficacious check to intemperate actions, than the belief that the children are themselves responsible for their physical deficiencies. A person may not care much for the evil consequences of his actions if they are to be confined to him; but his care to see his family happy may reform him.

Here are two explanations of our present misery, one given by the theory of Karma and

the other advanced by the Qur-án. No one can vouch for the truth of either on the strength of personal experience. We come out of oblivion and go into the same. No man, with a sensible head on his shoulders, can refer to what he has done in the previous life, though one is constrained to give a hearing to sundry silly stories, out of courtesy to certain "bluestockings," whose fancy has been attracted by the theory of which I have been speaking. No doubt one cannot speak with certainty on the subject; but of the two theories, that expounded by the Qur-án seems to me more wholesome in its effect on human character. The Hindu theory creates fatalism and weakens the sense of responsibility; and the most hideous part of it is, that it makes sin an essential for happiness and civilization!

These are not mere theories, but the actual realities of life. Go to those countries where the theory of Karma is adhered to in practice and you will see that this is true. In Rangoon (Burma), for example, people ride in conveyances called rickshaws, which are drawn by men. It is a Buddhist country and the rickshaw-man is

believed to be the reincarnated soul of one, who, in a previous state, did certain wrong to the person who rides in the rickshaw.

So far the theory is well enough ; but the trouble arises when, as happens sometimes, the rider does not pay him his right fare ; and feels quite justified, because the service rendered to him was only the just punishment awaiting the rickshaw-man. In a way, the passenger has been a blessing to the rickshaw-man, because he has given him an opportunity for atoning for the sin of his past life. I have taken this example at random, by way of illustration, but you will find throughout Burma and in China, how different disabilities, menial services and cases of oppression and hardship are explained by reference to the past.[1] If oppressors are to be looked upon as agencies for removing the taint of past

1 It has been contended by the Buddhists that the fate of the suffering or humiliated person is calculated to act as a deterrent for others. It is for a Buddhist to say how far it works in our every day affairs of life. But so far as the sufferer himself is concerned the problem of his atonement still remains unsolved—Publishers.

evil, would there not presently be an end to evil in the world?

Our interest in the coming generations does not ordinarily extend beyond the fourth, for the reason that some of us, if we are so far blessed as to behold some of our own descendants in our lifetime, have very little likelihood of beholding the fifth generation. Similarly the consequence of our evil actions sometimes does not extend beyond the third or fourth generation, and this helps to explain or define the responsibility of one person for the actions of another. The same truth is expressed in Exodus, chap. xx. v. 12.

## PLEASURE AND PAIN.

The whole difficulty is one of misconception—or rather failure to conceive adequately of pain, or of pleasure, or of the real object and purpose of this our earthly pilgrimage; for what is pain to one is pleasure to another, and who is to decide whether prince or peasant sleeps the sounder o'nights, or whether the millionaire or the bricklayer has the juster perception of the end of life?

Diversities of inclination, of purpose, and of vision are implanted in each one of us, neither is there one common source of happiness for all men.

The eminent in philosophy or science will not set great store by the pleasures of the table, while for the gourmet the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, be it physical or metaphysical, is but vanity and vexation of spirit.

Learning for one, lucre for another, beauty for a third, to love and be loved for a fourth,—all are riches, all stand for happiness; and who shall decide which of them all is the real happiness?

The real happiness is to be found in perfect contentment—and it is never found, and the reason why it is never found is a different reason in each individual case. It is wrong to say that we differ from one another in the proportion of our happiness; for each one has his own pain and his own pleasures, and they are equally balanced.

We come here to perfect our consciousness—

to evolve from our emotions, our sensibilities, and our passions, the higher concept of morality, and to sublimate the animal consciousness of our nature into the consciousness which is called Cosmic, which, in its turn, borders on the consciousness that is Divine.

Man may not attain thereto on this side of the grave. Rare cases there have been of rare personalities who have been enabled—though but faintly—to reproduce in their actions certain of the attributes of God—but that is all.

If in this life we perfect our individual consciousness, eliminating the animal that was in us, so that in the hour of death no trace of it remains—then we have accomplished that which we were sent into the world to do.

We shall then be fit and qualified to make further progress in the coming stages of life.

If the achievement of individual consciousness is equally attainable by different persons under varying conditions or degrees—or I might almost term them grades—of comfort and happiness, then it is clear that such differences of

grade are in themselves of no real consequence.

For one in whom the animal is still uppermost, riches are a real hindrance; while for one who has achieved individual consciousness they are just a real help for his further progress.

When we learn to respect the rights and susceptibilities of others, and to be true and just in all our dealings, we are rising to the plane of individual consciousness, when we take what is due to us, and give to others what is due to them—when, in fact we render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.

In this stage of consciousness, justice and equity, in perfection, are the distingushing influences; but when we have schooled ourselves to feel, to strive, to fend for others just as we should for ourselves, at that moment our consciousness rises to something higher—family consciousness, national, international, human, and finally cosmic consciousness, the plane whereon, instinctively and without effort, we can render unto God the things that are God's.

If different factors, working in different

persons, yet produce the same result, how can the diversity of fortune and condition, which is the lot of all mankind in this life, be the result of corresponding actions in a previous state?

The sublimation of our consciousness—the phrase is a cumbrous one, but it will serve to express the process which I have endeavoured to outline above—is the main purpose of our sojourn on earth; riches and poverty are both helpful and harmful to this end—helpful to one, harmful to another; a blessing to A, a curse to B, and *vice versa*; consequently there can be no ground whatever for any theory which ascribes the prosperity and poverty of this life to the good and evil deeds of an existence that is past.

And the same is true of all other cases wherein different persons have been variously endowed with the gifts of God.

In the ordinary way of life the organs of sense are the vehicles of knowledge—and any deficiency in one tends to strengthen the perceptive power of the others.

Blind persons are more imaginative than

those who possess the organs of physical sight; and if imagination be a blessing, and an aid to the perfection of knowledge and consciousness, then here is a blessing disguised as a curse.

It is not, however, through the exercise of the physical organs of sense that we obtain knowledge in the first instance; they do not bring us material—material which the mind, and the imagination working through the mind, transmutes into knowledge more or less complete.

A child will observe certain phenomena and be attraced by their appearance, but will rarely arrive at a conclusion even approximately right. An older person, on the other hand, may not see the thing itself at all, but, on its being explained to him, he understands it, both its nature and its significance—and thus obtains his knowledge.

Here again, it may be said, this knowledge is obtained through an organ of the sense :— *i.e.* hearing, and this is of course, true; but the organ of hearing, if indeed it is to obtain knowledge, must have a mind, already stocked with knowledge, and with that offspring of knowledge

properly applied—imagination; otherwise the said organ is of little use.

When, as sometimes happens, a hard problem arises, to which it is necessary that we devote our whole minds, to the exclusion of all other matters—we elect, if possible, to sit with closed eyes, in a room apart, so that we may be distracted neither by seeing nor hearing; in other words, we deprive ourselves of the use of these senses in order that we may use those that remain to the fuller advantage; and the implication would seem to be that exercise of these external senses constitutes a serious distraction to the higher functions of imagination.

So it follows that if the main object of our earthly course is the attainment of knowledge, the loss or impairing of the organs of sense must be a blessing, if anything; a reward for past good deeds, rather than the punishment of old misdoing.

But, it will be asked, what about babies who die and leave the world just after they have entered it? Their earthly course consists but of a coming and a going—how will it be counted

to them in the Divine Scheme of progress?

I think that when such a baby is born—and dies at birth, the first stage of its life pilgrimage is accomplished.

Now I have shown that human consciousness differs from the consciousness of animals in that it is progressive in character.

The development of animal consciousness is bounded by a certain fixed limit of growth, beyond which it cannot go—while to the progress of human consciousness there is no limit.

If, indeed, mind has been evolved out of matter, and man's body is compounded of a like substance with that of animals—such difference of shape, manner and consciousness as are found to exist in the two organisms, must be ascribed to the differences in the combinations and proportions of the various ingredients. The matter is the same, but different combinations of its component elements, produce in one frame animal, in another, human consciousness.

The object of the purpose involved in the birth of a child, is achieved, as to its first stage,

whether the child die immediately after birth, or live on the earthly plane; because human consciousness has appeared—has performed, as it were, the initial stage of its pilgrimage.

Moreover, one of the necessary conditions for the further development of human consciousness is its death, or passing, from the form which it takes for its earthly existence; and that condition is fulfilled even if the baby dies at birth.

Such consciousness, with its limitless capacity for future progress, is to be found nowhere else among created things. It is, in fact, in itself, a separate and independent entity.

It comes into being, at least, when a child is born—even though in the case of immediate death, it cannot avail itself of those opportunities —only to be found on earth—which were to qualify it for further progress on the plane beyond the grave. Yet, at the same time, it will have been spared those blemishes and sullying influences which it would have almost certainly incurred, and which would have retarded its upward course.

By way of illustration, let me put it in this way.

We are born with a clean sheet, which is to serve as canvas, for a beautiful landscape painting.

In this life our task is to sketch in certain outlines only; and we cannot proceed with the subsequent work until we have left this earth.

In a few cases, we succeed in drawing the required outlines, but we generally contrive to spoil the canvas in some way—soil it with innumerable erasures, and generally make the clean sheet filthy.

As a result of which, the canvas will have to be cleaned and bleached—and restored to its spotless condition, in which we received it at the beginning.

The dirty cloth is placed in boiling water with the required acid added, and then rinsed, mangled and ironed and the boiling water, the acid, the rinsing, mangling and ironing are, to pursue the analogy, the different forms of Hell

mentioned in the Qur-án, representing the cleansing processes which the canvas of the soul must undergo in order to be rendered fit for the resumption of the painting.

In the case, then, of the death of a very young child, the soul's canvas has received no touch of the pencil, it leaves the earth without any attempt at drawing or outline, but, at the same time, without blemish and without spot.

And under careful guidance, it may be that these outlines will be drawn elsewhere—and the picture, in the due time, be painted.

The truth has been beautifully expressed in one of the Sayings of the Prophet that "those babies who die are received in the careful arms of Abraham." For Abraham is the father of all nations, and a father's care will not be lacking for the little life cut off from earth.

The Qur-án advances yet another argument to show that the earth trappings of the spirit not only are not indispensable to the perfection of knowledge, but may, on occasions, tend to destroy the knowledge already attained, and so

be no more a help but a hindrance.

The Book refers to the period of man's dotage—when his physical nature becomes very weak and his mental faculties are waning, and the knowledge that he has already gained is fast slipping away:

> And Allah has created you, then He causes you to die, and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life, so that after having knowledge he does not know anything; surely Allah is Knowing, Powerful.[1]

The spirit of its earthly environment is the same, and that which was indispensably helpful to the attainment of knowledge has turned into a formidable hindrance.

Day by day when man sinks into dotage, he is losing more and more of the knowledge he has laboured so abundantly to obtain; and it is more desirable for the spirit to be free of its earthly covering than to remain.

But, be it remembered, we enter into this life devoid of any knowledge whatsoever. In the words of the Qur-án:

1 The Holy Qur-án. xvi: 70.

And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers—you did not know anything—and He gave you the hearing and the sight and the hearts that you may give thanks.[1]

You may explain it by the word "forgetfulness"—but forgetfulness implies, at least, something to remember; and our mind at birth is blank utterly—with all impressions of past experiences, if any, wiped out.

Exceptional intelligence in children cannot be ascribed to knowledge gained in a previous existence.

In the first place, examples of exceptional intelligence—apart from mere precocity, which is a perfectly natural and all too common blend of quickness and impudence—are extremely rare, and in the second place where it does occur, it may, in most cases, be justly ascribed to heredity: and so the Qur-án by citing these two phenomena, our blankness of mind on entering the world and the impediment afforded by our earthly covering in old age, when it becomes a hindrance and a destroyer of

1 The Holy Qur-án. xvi; 78.

knowledge, meets the argument that this earthly sojourn and its environment, are not indispensable to the perfecting of knowledge.

## GOOD AND EVIL.

We have before us two theories as to the ultimate cause of things—the one originally advanced in Brahminism, and now adopted by Theosophists, the other set forth in the Qur-án.

The premeasurement of good and evil by God, is, with us Muslims, an article of Faith; but this is not to be confused with Fatalism. We are not fatalists—nay, to a greater extent than others do we believe faithfully and steadfastly that man is the master of his own destiny, the captain of his soul. If he will but put his hand to the means that God has freely given him, he may make every moment of his life beautiful—the desert places of his earthly pilgrimage, to blossom as the rose.

And—save only in cases of definite affliction and deprivation—these means are equally within the reach of all men.

Everything that comes from God is good—is designed for and intended to do good—but it must be used in the right way. Used fittingly and within limits it is of use to us. When those limits are disregarded, it is abused and, it may be, a source of harm. All poisons have their proper use, and each has been created for a special and beneficent purpose. When used for that purpose, it is good. Take the case of two drugs, having contrary properties; if we are to decide as to their nature, are we to call one good and the other bad? That would scarcely be reasonable, seeing that each is good—and its evil is consequent only on misuse.

God created all things for the good of humanity, and made certain laws for their use, by conforming with which we are to make their goodness apparent. When we do not so conform, we turn what was good into evil, and suffer the consequences. These laws are pre-ordained and prescribed by God, and they are made known to us either by Divine Revelation or by scientific discovery—which is after all but another manner of that Revelation; and the fact that everything in Nature does work under

prescribed laws, is one which no thinking person can seriously attempt to gainsay. Everything is, therefore, so designed as to exhibit its good qualities under given conditions—its evil qualities where these conditions are not regarded; so that the measure of evil they produce is commensurate with the measure of evil they suffer, and these measures, limits, or laws are preordained of God.

It is in this sense only that Muslims believe in Pre-destination.

Under the theory of Karma, present pain and present happiness are preordained as a consequence, respectively, of past evil or good actions; and it follows that if present actions fail to bear fruit, our destiny in this life is sealed already. Nothing we can do will alter it.

In the Muslim conception, on the other hand, our destiny follows our actions in this life, in the observance of the law with respect to the use of things around us. If we keep within its limits we reap good, if not, evil overtakes us.

Of the two, the Muslim theory would seem

to be more conducive to scientific research; and if we believe that the Divine Laws are immutable, and that all human misery is but the consequence of their violation, surely we have every incentive towards making ourselves acquainted with those laws—so that we may keep from offence. But in the Karma theory there is no such inducement at all. If misfortune befall us on account of some misdeed in a past life, no amount of knowledge will alleviate it in this. Conceivably it might help us in a life to come; but if this present life of ours is a sealed mystery, we can have no great inducement to work out our own salvation. Immediate palpable gain is, in almost every case, the best incentive, and in Karma, such incentive is impossible, while Islam places it foremost.

Have not scientific research and discovery contributed enormously to our comfort and happiness? Infant mortality has been reduced to a minimum, plague and pestilence have been fought and vanquished; travel by land or by water—nay and even by air—is unattended by any greater average of risk than attaches to sitting at home in an arm-chair; and all has

come about by reason of our gradual discovery of the limits of use and abuse—the measurement of good and evil, whereas if a disaster—a railway accident—a shipwreck—or the crashing of an air-liner—is to take place as the consequence of some evil deed done in a past existence by one or other of the parties involved, no amount of human care or foresight can possibly avert it.

The old Brahmin books speak of various actions of a past life as resulting in corresponding bodily illnesses in the life to come. But if A is foredoomed to catch a fever, and suffer from it, as the consequence of some past evil act, is it worth his while to consult a doctor?

Theories may be excellent and plausible as theories, but they must stand the test of reality.

We may be attracted by some ingenious theory, which professes to explain and reconcile every incongruity in the universe.

But the incongruous of to-day becomes the appropriate—nay, the commonplace—of to-morrow.

What, in old time, was regarded as a danger, was so regarded simply because of our ignorance of the nature of it. Better knowledge has proved that thing to be really a blessing, if used properly and in the light of science.

No theory should be seriously entertained that does not tend to aid the increase of knowledge, and the sense of responsibility.

The laws of heredity and consanguinity are truths upon which the welfare of society depends. If I believe that the result of my actions will not stop short with me, in my own life; but will continue and affect the lives of others yet to be, it is the duty of religion and of legislation so to control my actions that they may not spread their evil effects broadcast.

The law of heredity is very simply stated in the 20th chapter of the Book of Exodus, and the Qur-án gives a warning to the like effect.

Will not some of the Eugenic laws, in a form less severe than that which is demanded by their advocates, secure the happiness of the coming generation ?

If the Creator has announed that it is one of His laws that the coming generation which is to inherit the good things of its ancestors, must also inherit the consquences of their evil actions—and if our belief that this is so, is strong and sincere, then surely, anxiety for our children's sake will prevent us from doing any act which may bring misfortune on them.

In conclusion, I would repeat that no one can prove the truth of either of the theories under discussion on materialist grounds; and that precedence in belief should be given to that theory which encourages knowledge and a sense of duty.

## RETURNABILITY OF THE MATTER.

There is, however, another aspect of Nature's working which may perhaps induce us to accept for the moment the theory under discussion—the ultimate returning of all ingredients, in all earthly organisms, to their original form.

There is no waste in Nature. When any form of matter becomes decomposed, its

component parts disperse and, sometimes it may be, resume their original shapes.

Here is a circumstance which may perhaps lead the advocates of the theory to argue the return of the unperfected spirit to its earthly sojourn.

But such is not the case ; and for this reason.

Everything consists of two parts which we will call J and A. J is the essence and A its covering—the Substance and the Accident.

Everything is moving towards the one far off divine event—perfection or fulfilment. There are many stages to be passed on the way, and in each stage J assimilates something from its environment which tends to aid in making A actual and existent ; those latent potentialities which are intended to be disclosed at that stage. When the thing has passed through that stage, and is about to enter on the next in the ascending scale, it becomes decomposed ; that is to say its two parts become separated. J the essence in its developed form, going on, but A, the matter which J has assimilated, returns to

nature to be again assimilated by other progressive entities.

The seed, planted in the earth, passes through many stages before it bears fruit ; and in each stage the processes of assimilation and decomposition are going on every minute.

The essence of the seed continues, from stage to stage—but the covering it takes in each stage is left behind at the conclusion of that stage.

In the growth of our bodies, too, the same thing is discernible.

Every minute, some secretion or other passes out of the body, and returns to nature—so that, it has been said, in the course of seven years, we get an absolutely new body ; but the essence of the body does not change.

J in this case is consciousness ; and A is the body.

When we leave the earth, it is our consciousness that goes, leaving behind the body which was only an assistance to growth on this earthly

plane, and no essential part of the equipment of progress.

It is obvious that every man's consciousness does not attain perfection nor indeed come within very close range of the limit fixed for the development attainable on earth.

Does unperfected consciousness, then, return to the earth, assuming the shape of some other organism to perfect its growth? Or does it take on other and new clothing, which awaits it in its struggle towards perfection, to aid its further progress in the life beyond the grave?

The things to be attained—assimilated—on the plane of earth, are knowledge, and that which should be its natural consequent—experience; or, in other words, the development of those moral qualities which constitute perfection in humanity.

The animal element in all of us, which is evolved from the physical side of our nature, comprises certain passions and emotions; and these, sublimated into a moral and spiritual nature, bring us to perfection on this plane;

such perfection being attainable by knowledge and experience, which, in their turn, need opportunity and occasions, which may not fall to the lot of every person. Hence, it has been argued, reincarnation becomes not reasonable merely, but necessary.

Knowledge, in short, is necessary if we are to perfect our earthly course, and in the physical side of our being lies the chief impediment to knowledge.

Mental power becomes intensified as bodily strength diminishes.

The faculty of perception—I suppose it may be called perceptivity—is potentially equal in every man; but when it is least hindered by the fleshly integument, it is enhanced to a marvellous degree.

Does it not follow, therefore, that this faculty would be better fitted for its high emprise—the achievement of knowledge—if it could sever itself completely from its physical entanglement?

Here, on earth, the eyes of the mind are not fully open—their vision is blurred, obscured, unpenetrating, and it is our physical nature that makes it so.

Death alone will remove the blur—dissipate the obscurity, bring the vision that penetrates and perceives clearly.

"Now we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face," said the Christian Apostle; and in death all things become clear to us.

Here, on our earthly pilgrimage, the spirit is as it were a blindfolded being, groping for knowledge.

Life's experiences and hardships will lift the bandage a little—and to the extent that knowledge is increased thereby do we advance on our quest towards perfection.

Our progress, therefore, depends on the raising of the bandage—the tearing of the evil; and seeing that the process is gradual, the knowledge comes to us gradually, in the natural course of things; easily and without pain or hardship.

Death will bring the final revelation—it may be gradually and peacefully; it may be with pain and violence; but when Death has removed the bandage—Perfect Knowledge will appear.

Wherefore, perfection, in this life, is, in great part indeed, the perfecting of our power of receiving knowledge.

Where humanity has attained its utmost set limit of perfection, it is qualified for further progress in another sphere; but in the case of an imperfect soul it is not so, and with its imperfections exposed to a stronger current, as it were, of knowledge its task of development becomes more painful—more difficult. The soul's bitterness of remorse when it finds its inability to keep pace with others becomes intensified—the sense of impotence and disqualification—and the infinitely painful task of qualifying oneself in some abnormal way, are certain of the forms of Hell described in the Qur-án.

So, to sum up, there is no progress at all if we are to enter into this world a second time,

blindfolded as before—more especially in view of the fact that the screen has been removed once.

There are better chances of acquiring more, and yet more knowledge, then to go through another earthly existence ; more especially when the hindrances of our physical vesture have been done away with.

The knowledge vouchsafed to us in trances or visions is of greater worth to us in our struggle towards perfection, than that which we attain in the normal course of our everyday life.

I myself have learnt many things from visions—things which otherwise could only have come to me through years of experience—years of learning and it, may be, not even then.

In dealing with my own character my experience has been the same. Often something which constitutes a real blemish on the soul remained hidden from me for a long time—or when appearing, showed itself in a false and alluring garb—so that I never thought of reforming myself in that respect at all. Nevertheless at the appointed time, I saw in a vision,

and beheld it, in all its ugliness. Horrible, painful and bitter were the moments of the vision; but when I arose from my bed, I had seen the truth which, alas, I might never have suspected till my dying day.

From this we learn two things—first, that inasmuch as trances and visionary powers come into play only when the physical senses are asleep, and while the mind is working to the full unimpeded, the soul of man is better qualified to make up its deficiencies when totally divested of its earthly garb, than if it were to come a second time to earth in human shape.

And the second thing is this; that a few moments' painful experience in a dream may produce a more profitable—a more chastening effect than years of hardship could bring about.

Will not Hell, then, be a speedier and better road to the reformation of character than another life on earth; when we know that the hardships of this earthly life are reckoned the best teachers, and by them, virtue and high character are held to be most fitly moulded?

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